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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptualization that interprets the processes of policymaking, institution building, and change planning as aspects of the same generic phenomenon of cultural action. Central to this conceptualization is a view of power that explains the dynamics of these related processes while it demonstrates their integral unity. The sole intent of the policymaking process is asserted to be the directing and harnessing of social power for social outcomes. (Author/WM)

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# THE DESIGN OF (EDUCATIONAL) POLICY: DIRECTING AND HARNESSING SOCIAL POWER FOR SOCIAL OUTCOMES

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# THE DESIGN OF (EDUCATIONAL) POLICY: DIRECTING AND HARNESSING SOCIAL POWER FOR SOCIAL OUTCOMES

By H.S. Bhola*

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptualization that interprets the processes of policy making, institution building and planning of change to be the various aspects of the same generic phenomenon of cultural action. Central to this conceptualization is a view of power which explains the dynamics of these related processes while it demonstrates their integral unity. The sole intent of the policy making process is asserted to be to direct and to harness social power for social outcomes.

The word "Educational" appears in the title above in parenthesis to make the point that while this paper does relate to the world of education by using, whenever necessary, examples of questions, issues, and actions of concern to educators, a discussion of the basic nature and function of the policy making process need not be confined in each case to each separate policy segment within societies. Whether in education or in welfare, in national defense or in defense of the environment, the purposes of policy making are the same--mediating between ideologies and actual social actions for creating new relationships between man and other men.

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The assumption here of a synoptic perspective on educational policy, hopefully, is not an attempt on the part of the speaker to ignore the real and immediate concerns of the Educational Policy Conference and to retire to the security of his own favourite themes outherwise unrelated to the Conference. Such accusations are not altogether unfairly hurled at some speakers at some academic conferences and seminars. But the view to be presented here is rooted in a conviction--born out of some actual experience of participation in policy making--that the process of policy making can be best understood as a political process within the context of social change and cultural action. This paper is yet a definitional paper and its essential interest is in developing a definition of the policy making process.

## A Model of Social Change and Cultural Action

An examination of the nature and function of policy and its relationship with ideology on the one hand, and institution building on the other, must be undertaken within the larger framework of planned social change and cultural action. Questions must be asked about the dynamics of the social change process. Wherein lies the motive force for change in societies? Where do the initiatives for social change arise? How and why is change invented, initiated, and

implemented? Who dreams up change? Whose visions and wills get reflected in those planned social futures?

These questions were in fact raised and some answers attempted in an earlier paper by this author, entitled, "Notes Toward a Theory: Cultural Action as Elite Initiatives in Affiliation/Exclusion."[1] That paper has been used as a springboard for the ideas presented later in this paper. A recapitulation is necessary.

Most Americans seem to have a sense of guilt about holding and exercising power especially in interpersonal settings; and show repugnance for concepts such as "the elite," "directed change," and "power exchange." It should be useful, therefore, to repeat here Bertrand Russell's assertion that Power is a concept as fundamental to social and behavioral sciences as Energy is to physics; and that "the laws of social dynamics are...only capable of being stated in terms of power in its various forms."[2] [Italics added.] This is the assumption on which the following model had been built and on which the proposed conceptualization of policy as a mechanism for directing social power is now being based.

According to the Affiliation/Exclusion Model of Social Change, the world is a stage, culture is play, and power is the stuff of the whole drama. To be is to be able to experience power--through grasping, bending, clearing, changing physical and symbolic environment. Thus to be

is to be powerful, and man deals with power both as subject and object.

Society is seen as existing in communication through which power transactions are actualized. Ever since man became a symbol-user, power is no more merely physical but has become symbolically confounded. It now comes packaged in many forms.

The Elite (defined in the dictionary as "the choice part, the best") are the privileged in power. The Elite conceive, initiate and lead change within systems which own them, and which, in a very real sense, the elite, in turn, own. The elite are ideological, they identify with certain systems of ideas and they generate cultural action through a process of affiliating the masses to their systems of ideas, often deliberately excluding some others from their social designs.

To qualify as elite, aspirants must have, in some degree, all of the following attributes: (a) A system of ideas that they have themselves invented or one they identify with--the higher they are in the elite hierarchy, the greater is their ideological consciousness; (b) A heightened need to experience power through an active commitment to their chosen ideology--active commitment may not necessarily mean overt action and agitation; and (c) Ability to build institutions to implement their policies and to perpetuate such institutional products for continuity in their ideological thrusts.

The Affiliation/Exclusion Model of Social Change proposed three elite types: The absolute elite "those considering themselves subject to no control or check except outside circumstances;"[3] the authorized elite "those claiming authority to exercise power on behalf of someone else or some group for the purpose of achieving results determined or described by them;"[4] and the instrumental elite who become the instruments of conquest and annexation, and go forth to conquer and annex for the absolute and their authorized elite.[5]

The elite are seen as competing for the minds of the masses in a society, sometimes with legitimization from within the system, and at other times without the benefit of systemic support. We can thus talk in terms of the power elite and the contending elite selling different dreams to the masses.

Each elite group conducts cultural action through a process of affiliation of some groups and proportions of peoples and exclusion of some others. Again, the elite may offer full affiliation involving (a) greater economic rewards, (b) improved social status, and (c) shared power or they may offer only partial affiliation. The modes of affiliation used by the elite are many--army, church, factory, school, voting booth and development extension have been typically used.

Finally, the Affiliation/Exclusion Model considers education as a special affiliation mode, as a double-edged weapon, that liberates and elitizes individuals while partially or fully affiliating groups to the elite-generated systems.

## Policy Directions as Initiatives for Social Interventions

The preceding sketch of the model that views cultural action as resulting from initiatives taken by the elite for affiliation or exclusion of the masses to or from their systems of ideas and actions, and the rewards that accompany memberships in those systems, is understandably brief. It should, nonetheless, suggest that policy directions could be viewed as initiatives taken by policy makers to develop and exercise social options as they make interventions for change within social systems. Some complementary remarks are in order to articulate the thrust of the model and to avoid some possible confusions.

A distinction should be made between the terms "powerful" and "powerful." It is being suggested here that to be is to be powerful, which is not necessarily to be powerful in the commonsense meaning of the term. The implication is that every individual by the sheer fact of being a social being, however humble, must have power; and not to have some

individual power is not to be. An individual may, of course, have much lesser power than another individual; and individuals are indeed seen as differing in their needs to experience power and in their capacities to exercise it.

The conception of man as powerful should bring with it an optimistic view of man's social possibilities. He has power to confront other power. By coalescing his individual power with the power of other individuals, man can resist and overthrow tyranny. This is the perspective from which the "power of the people" makes any sense at all.

The power that inheres in the people remains atomized however, and does not become effective social power unless organized. Social discontent and social spontaneity must be organized for social action by the elite in the society. This view of the social role of the elite in societies must not lead us back into despair but encourage us to examine questions such as the following: How are the elite recruited? What are their ideologies? Is elite pluralism permitted and sustained within the society? Answer to these questions should determine if there is cause for happiness or for sorrow in a society.

It is our view that an "elite society" is possible wherein all of the people have been elitized through

education and socialization and where social structures have been invented that can accommodate the exercise of power and the expression of the will of most of its people.

Finally, one need not draw the conclusion that all power transactions take place in a win-lose situation. Power may be used collaboratively, altruistically, or may not be brought into play at all for lack of commitment or for reasons of the heart.

We now proceed to define social systems in terms of the concept of power. This definition is an important element of the conceptual structure that would then interpret social change as new arrangements in patterns of power transactions in societies, policy making as a mechanism for directing social power and institution building as a way of systematically creating and continuing the momentum of new thrusts in societies.

## Social Systems as Power Fields

We have already suggested that the human individual should be seen as a nucleus of power with inherent potential for making power transactions. A multiplicity of power transactions between individuals territorially confined[6] within the same social space may be seen as resulting over time in a "system of interferences," a power field with boundaries; in other words, a social organization. This social organization may be formal or informal, temporary

or semi-permanent, cohesive or incoherent. The larger society then may be conceptualized as an emergent power field resulting from many power fields informal and formalized, temporary and semi-permanent, coterminuous with, built in, and built around each other, overlapping and intersecting at multiple planes. Power is the ghost in the social machine. It is the plasma pulsating through all social organisms, formal or informal, in stability or change, disintegrating or reintegrating.

An important point should now be made: Power is absolutely necessary for any work to be done within any social system. Again, the power field to be able to generate work must have a gradient, that is, power across the body politic must be non-uniformly distributed. The differential distribution of power within and between power systems may give rise to different political systems--anarchy, oligarchy, democracy and totalitarianism--and to different institutional arrangements--a pyramidal bureaucracy or a creative adhocracy. This should be a useful insight that could be used deliberately in organizational design and social planning in seeking to build different patterns of power distributions with their own appropriate power gradients. The foregoing should also point to the fact that all functional social systems must have their own elite, those who have more power than those around them to create the social gradient that is essential for any societal work

to get done. This discussion should also reinforce our definition of the elite and the various ways we have suggested of categorizing them.

Before going on to discuss the nature of policy and of the policy making process, let us indicate that power has come to acquire many different forms at the present time in human history. It is no more merely physical force (or organized physical force) but has come to be symbolically packaged in myriad forms. Money can be transformed into power; and knowledge can be transformed into power. Language can be used, in argument or in slogan, as effectively as the spear and the sword. There is not only individually held power, but ascribed power that arises within sets of mutual expectations among individuals in groups and organizations. Also new ways of experiencing power are being explored as man looks inward at his consciousness and learns to experience power without having to exercise it on others.

Flaunting physics to give a fake sense of precision to the discussion has not been part of the intent here. The concern has been to show that social dynamics might indeed be defined in terms of power and that a socio-physics of the symbolic human environment might be possible that could provide us with a set of parsimonious laws of social dynamics.

The Nature and Function of Policy

Philip G. Smith in a recent document[7] defined policy as follows:

1. Policy is a prescript for goals or courses of action established by and for an institution(s).

1.1. Any person, group, or institution may propose or recommend content for any policy but only persons authorized to perform the role may make policy--that is, formulate, legislate, or declare policy.

1.2. While the content of the policy may be very general, since it is made for a specific, temporal, institution(s), its prescription is contextual. Policy thus stands in contrast to theory and principles which are intended to be categorical and universal, that is, held as valid without reference to any particular time or place.

1.3. Policy as a prescript for goals or courses of action may be differentiated from rules and regulations that prescribe or proscribe specific acts.

1.4. Policy may exist at various levels corresponding to hierarchical relationships within or among institutions, or the various levels of program administration. For example, the Congress of the U.S. may legislate a policy concerning, say schooling for migrant workers; H.E.W. may issue policies designed to carry out the intent of congress; state departments of education may formulate policies for the participation of their particular states; and local school districts develop policies, and, finally, rules and regulations for local actions.

The Smith definition points up the institutional connection of policy makers, separates those authorized to make policy from those that may merely propose and recommend policies, underlines the contextual nature of policy making, refers to its goal orientation, and outlines several levels of policy. This definition of policy, as would any other

definition, anchored in the power paradigm generates useful insights on the nature and function of policy.

It should enable us, for example, to redefine policy as an instrument for directing social and institutional power for social outcomes. (See 1 above.) It should point to the political nature of the policy making process for policy is not categorical and universal but temporal and practical. (See 1.2 above.) Policy making is a process of reasoned choice[8] that aims to be feasible in a specified situation within a political context; it is, therefore, often incremental.[9]

Policy making is elite behavior. It is the elite who with their heightened ideological consciousness and need to experience power, chart new social directions and make and enunciate policy. The authorized elite in their policy making behavior have to respond to historical reality and objective circumstance; they also have to cope with the critiques of their policies provided by the contending elite. But it is the elite in power who formulate, legislate, or declare policy. (See 1.1 above.)

In defining policy making behavior in terms of the power paradigm, a distinction emerges between <u>policy</u> and <u>rules and regulations</u> that is almost intriguing. If policy making is a political process concerned with new social outcomes, it should always be envisioning new uses of power to create new or qualitatively new power relationships or distributions of goods in congruence with the newly established set of

power relationships, that is, alternative social hierarchies.[10] Conversely, if there is no intent toward creating a new pattern of power relationships or obtaining a new distribution of economic, educational or social goods, then it is not policy we are concerned with; we may be concerned merely with rules and regulations.

In the next section we will point to the functional relationship between policy making and institution building by defining institutions as power fields which, in turn, function as power houses that energize policy initiatives for social change. The corresponding relationships across levels of elite hierarchies, policy grades and spheres, and different institutional planes will also be demonstrated.

## Policy and Institution Building

Institutions are the end-products of formalization of human interactions. They are the mechanisms for harnessing social power in the direction that the elite, as policy makers, wish social power to be used for the social outcomes they have defined as desirable. Institutions are thus power configurations that, in turn, act on other institutional configurations to perform societal work. They are like the power stations that harness the power of the river and put it to work.

This way of looking at the role of institutions helps us to understand why so often the enunciation of policy by the power elite also includes references to institutional

arrangements which will be created to assure policy implementation. Examples of the concern of the policy maker with institutional arrangements are many and can be picked up from all sectors of policy making from international cooperation to agricultural extension. The new Nixon policy in the area of poverty included the abolition of the Office of Economic Opportunity. New policy directions in the area of educational R&D included the establishment of Regional Laboratories. New interest in adult education in Kenya led to the establishment of a Board of Adult Education in the country.

The policy making function is, however, related to institutions in another way. The power elite are power elite, and not the contending elite, because they are able to utilize the network of public institutions not only to implement policy but also to assist them in the formulation of new policy. Institutions once established come to acquire their own special subcultures, and world views. They come to acquire their own special way of defining problems which restricts the choice of options in the process of solution invention. They come to acquire not only their special organizational climates but also their special pathologies; and their will to survive colors their plans of actions.

A view of institutions as power fields, designed to generate changes within the configurations of power fields around them in the society, should enable us to distinguish between <u>governing policy</u> and <u>institutional policy</u>.

Institutional policy may be seen as the instrument for creating institutional capabilities that enable the achievement of the social tasks assigned to the institution; and the optimization of these capabilities once the institution has become a going concern. Its concern is intra-institutional. On the other hand, there is governing policy which guides the provision of the institution's goods and services to the client systems within the society.

Institutional policies could more appropriately be called plans, rules, and regulations. However, rule-making and regulating behavior within institutions does not sound as prestigious as does policy making. Rule-making behavior if given its real name would rob the instrumental elite (teachers, principals, professors, deans, supervisors, managers) within those institutions of the psychological boost and good feeling that they derive from perceiving themselves as policy makers. The label "writers of rules and draftsmen for regulations" would not be elevating though is might be a more accurate description.

The chart on the next page delineates and exemplifies the relationships between elite hierarchies, policy levels and spheres, and institutional planes.

Divisions of policy interests between levels of elite categories are not always completely clear-cut, nor are the distinctions between governing policy and institutional policy always too sharply demarcated. In some societies the absolute elite have no authorized elite groups to lean

| ELITE CATEGORY | FUNCTIONAL ORIENTATION | INSTITUTIONAL SCOPE | POLICY INTERESTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | GOVERNING POLICY | INSTITUTIONAL POLICY |
| The Absolute Elite | Ideological/ Cultural | Synoptic: All institutions in the society | To shape the new socialist man | To structure more effective Party-Government collaboration |
| The Authorized Elite | Political/ Allocative | Segmental: Multiple institutions in a sector of the society | To establish equality of educational opportunity for all segments of the society | To carry out an administrative reform within the Ministry of Education |
| The Instrumental Elite | Instrumental/ Technical | Specific: One particular institution in the total institutional network | To establish an open admissions policy for the university | To create a new department of teacher education in a school of education |

upon, nor have yet recruited experienced instrumental elite to their causes, with the result that they themselves seem to be working in all the policy areas all across the board. In other cases tensions within the system develop as the elite at lower levels of hierarchy begin to encroach upon the territories of those above them, while the latter attempt to define and defend their privileges. Again, some of the institutional policies may turn out to have important substantive governing policy implications as social consequences of those policies unfold.

The policy interests of the various elite as shown in the table above have been included therein only by way of example and not to assert their empirical veracity. These examples intend to define generally the territory of each elite group in the total process of cultural action and to demarcate the scope of interventions typically made by the elite at the various levels of the hierarchy.

While elite in all the different categories have policy interests in both the governing policy and the institutional policy areas, the instrumental elite are most often concerned with institutional polices; that is, in creating instrumentalities for actions responsive to needs defined by the elite in higher categories.

## A Summary of the Discussion

A summary of the argument so far can be presented in terms of the following set of statements:

Individuals are power nuclei and social systems are power fields.

Social change is change in the configuration of power fields in a society, that is, social change involves change in power relationships within systems exemplified by new distributions of economic rewards, new patterns of statuses, or new obligations for communication and compliance.

Policy making is the process of giving direction or redirection to social power resulting in new power patterns or social outcomes.

Institutions (or organizations), which in themselves are power fields, harness social power over time to both multiply individual endeavors and to provide system and continuity to the efforts of policy makers to make desired social change happen. Most change in societies is thus organizationally-mediated.

Policy making behavior which responds to socio-political systems can be distinguished from rule making behavior which responds to socio-technical systems. The former constitutes governing policy making and the latter institutional policy making.

## Implications

In the preceding we have suggested a way of looking at policy that brings out the essential nature of the policy making process as being the invention and institutionalization of social choice.

What is the usefulness of this particular perspective? Before we attempt to answer this question, there is a prior question. Is this perspective all that particular? Students of policy before us have indeed pointed to the political nature of the policy making process; the special relationship between policy and institutions has been noted before; and the relationship between policy and social change has always been taken for granted if not always clarified.

1. What is new in this exercise is a systematic use of the concept of power to explain the process of cultural action; and the definition of policy making, institution building and social change in terms of power alone. Social change, institution building, policy formulation and power manipulation all become part of the same phenomena of praxis. The relationship between these processes is articulated, and the basic simplicity in their relationship is elucidated.

1.1 Such a conception should direct our attention immediately to the power dealers--the elite in societies--and to the need to study and to lay bare the highly centralized aspect of decision making in most sectors of social action in most societies. This should challenge some myths about democratic participation in policy formulations while it helps explore new patterns for making participative policy design a reality.

1.2 The role of institutions in the exercise of power by the elite as policy makers becomes dramatically clear. That

most social change is indeed organizationally-mediated emerges as a useful insight. One begins to understand why the enunciation of new policy often includes establishment of new institutional arrangements as part of the policy initiatives.

1.3 This conception can also provide frameworks for generating models of policy analysis and policy evaluation that are both political and technical; and at the same time provide contexts for comparisons and contrasts in policy formulation processes within various ideological settings.

2. The real nature of educational policy and the role of educationists in the process of policy making becomes clear also. The essential political nature of educational policy gets underlined. We begin to see that while education at its best is liberating as it contributes to individual growth, it also has a social utility function. It credentials its clients. Credentials are directly related to jobs and to incomes in most cases, and since both knowledge and money are power, education is power. In other words, substantive educational policy is essentially concerned with the redistribution of educational goods which can be converted into other goods in the market. Educationists in conferring degrees and certificates are indirectly concerned with creating or reinforcing stratifications which are, by definition, superordinate-subordinate power strata.

2.1 This approach thus points directly to the fact that educators are willy-nilly in the power business. Educators --university professors, school teachers while they deal with power every day of their lives--respond with fear when made to confront these realities. The realization of this important social/political function of education should challenge educators to make social and political analyses of educational policies, proposed or followed, so that they do not become unsuspecting tools of the elite groups they would not willingly wish to support.

2.2 Similar analyses can be undertaken for other segmental policies, for instance, for science policy, environmental policy, welfare policy and communication policy. One can ask questions about the economic and social goods and services being produced and/or allocated by policies in those areas. One can ask if there is any congruence between different policies of the same power elite. How might environmental policy be reflected or neglected by concurrent educational policy? How might defense policy be making educational policy completely subservient to its purposes? How might communication policy be extinguishing rather than reinforcing educational policy intentions?

3. This conceptual mode as indicated earlier also enables us to make a distinction between (i) Policy of Public Instruction and (ii) Institutional Policy of an Educational Organization.

The policy of public instruction as conceived here must have external focus, it must be related to the production and distribution of educational goods. Questions about raising the quality of education in ghetto schools, the opening of more schools for migrant education workers, the establishment of different funding sources for schools or increasing fees for higher education, establishing new racial patterns of recruitment of students and faculties, bussing, affirmative action plans, are all policy issues related to public instruction.

Educational organizations, like all other agencies in Business, Army, Customs, Art and Finance, also have institutional policies. These institutional policies have internal focus. Their objectives always are instrumental--that is to develop the institution in a way that it can effectively and efficiently harness social power for the educational outcomes it has been created to realize. A better description of institutional policies would be rules (authoritative directions or enactments respecting the doing or method of doing something) and regulations (a rule prescribed for conduct). However, as we have indicated educators, like all other human beings, like to have somewhat exaggerated self concepts and like to think of themselves as policy makers.

3.1 Some rules and regulations, though, come to have important policy implications. A university may establish a rule on student housing and find itself unwittingly in

the area of student civil rights; similarly a new rule regarding student-teacher relationship in the classroom may come to acquire important substantive policy implications.

4. The special perspective presented here clarifies the policy making role of the educator qua educator and the educator qua citizen. As citizen the educator is an "elitized" individual who can recommend policy or critique what is proposed by the power elite and can thus play some part in the establishment of policy of public instruction as well as social and political policy in general. However, the role of the educator qua educator in designing policy in the area of public instruction is rather limited. Educators are basically the instrumental elite whose job is to keep the educational institutions functioning for the achievement of tasks assigned to them. The important questions about new social purposes, and new distribution of educational goods are answered by the politician. Only infrequently are educators able to take policy initiatives that go farther than rules and regulations for the educational institutions they happen to serve.

## Conclusion

It has not been our intent to suggest that policy is not sometimes misdirected, or is not even deliberately dishonest at times. Policies may be immoral, selfish or based on wrong social diagnosis leading to unfortunate or

unanticipated social outcomes. At other times policies may be enunciated for symbolic reasons to give a society a false sense of movement and with obvious disregard for possibilities of their implementation. That is, policies may be enunciated, but there may be no resources, and no institutional support for their implementation. Or institutions set up as part of those policy initiatives may be dysfunctional.

The agenda for educators seems rather obvious. They should be interested in policies of public instruction both as possible influentials and as investigators. They should develop in themselves and in their students understandings of the political nature of policy formulation, of the processes of valuation and evaluation of policy, of strategies to influence policies to be both moral and effective. They should learn to distinguish between the political and technical, between the essential and the inessential, between the apparent and the implicit in policy design. As researchers they must analyze current policy themes to bare their hidden purposes and latent implications, develop models for policy analysis and systems for policy monitoring, prepare social inventories to both focus and measure impact on various groups in the society, and they must experiment with institutional strategies that will make policy formulation and policy implementation an honest, participative and creative process.

## Footnotes and References


1. H.S. Bhola, "Notes Toward a Theory: Cultural Action as Elite Initiatives in Affiliation/Exclusion," Viewpoints, Vol. 48, No. 3, May 1972, Pages 1-37.

2. Bertrand Russell, Power: A Social Analysis, New York: W. W. Norton, 1938, p. 15.

3. Adolph A. Berle, Power. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967, p. 95.

4. Ibid.

5. Bhola, op. cit.

6. The automobile, the jet engine and the electronic revolution in human communication, together, have drastically redefined our old conceptions of man's territoriality and, consequently, of locality and community.

7. "On Policy," a brief statement prepared by Prof. Philip G. Smith as an in-house document for the Center for International Activities and Policy Studies in Education, School of Education, Indiana University (Mimeo, dated August 30, 1974).

8. This is the definition of policy used by Eugene J. Meehan in his "Policies and Inventories: An Analysis," mimeo, undated, 90 pages.

9. For a detailed discussion of synoptic versus incremental strategies of policy formulation see D. Braybrooke and C. E. Lindbloom, A Stragegy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process. New York: The Free Press, 1963.

10. Where the maintenance of the status quo is the purpose of policy, it should be seen as an instance of force applied contrary to pressures for social change.